

DIAGNOSIS BY FEELING (Palpation)

DME class 7

DIAGNOSIS BY FEELING

- Diagnosis by feeling includes palpation of the pulse, skin, limbs, hand, chest, abdomen and points.

PULSE DIAGNOSIS

- Pulse diagnosis is an extremely complex subject with many ramifications, and the following will only be a simple discussion of it in the context of Chinese diagnosis.

- Pulse diagnosis is important for two reasons:
- 1. because it can give very detailed information on the state of the internal organs, and
- 2. because it reflects the whole complex of Qi and Blood.

- The pulse can be seen as a clinical manifestation, a sign like any other such as thirst, insomnia or a red face.
- The important difference is that the pulse also reflects the organism as a whole, the state of Qi, Blood and Yin, the Yin and Yang organs, all parts of the body, and even the constitution of a person.
- The tongue can reflect these phenomena too, but less so than the pulse.

- Main drawback of pulse diagnosis: it is extremely subjective.
- If a face is red, or if a tongue is red, these are quite objective signs, and anyone can see them.
- Feeling the pulse is an extremely subtle skill and is very difficult to learn.

- The pulse can give very detailed information on the state of the internal organs, but it is also subject to external, short-term influences, which make its interpretation very difficult indeed and fraught with pitfalls.
- It is a “real-time” reading, though it can also reflect much older disharmonies as well

- For example, if a person has been running upstairs the pulse becomes rapid very quickly, and it would be wrong to interpret that as a sign of a "Heat pattern".
- If a person has had an emotional upset or shock, the pulse will also change quickly.
- From this point of view, the tongue is less subject to such short-term influences.

- The practice of taking the pulse on the radial artery was started by the "Classic of Difficulties".
- Before that, the pulse was felt at nine different arteries, three on the head, three on the hands and three on the legs, reflecting the state of the Upper, Middle and Lower Burner respectively.
- This location for pulse-taking was described in the "Simple Questions" in chapter 20.

- Three on the head:
- Taiyang: To examine the Qi at the corners of the head
- ST-3: Qi of mouth and teeth
- TB-21: Qi of ears and eyes.

- Three on the hands:
- LU-9: To examine the Qi of the Lung
- L.I.-4: Qi of the chest
- HE-7: Qi of the Heart

- Three on the legs (feet):
- LR-10 (LR-3): To examine the Qi of the Liver
- KI-3: Qi of the Kidneys
- SP-11 (ST-42): Qi of the Spleen and Stomach

- The "Classic of Difficulties" established the practice of feeling the pulse at the radial artery, dividing it into three areas and feeling it at three different levels, i.e superficial, middle and deep.

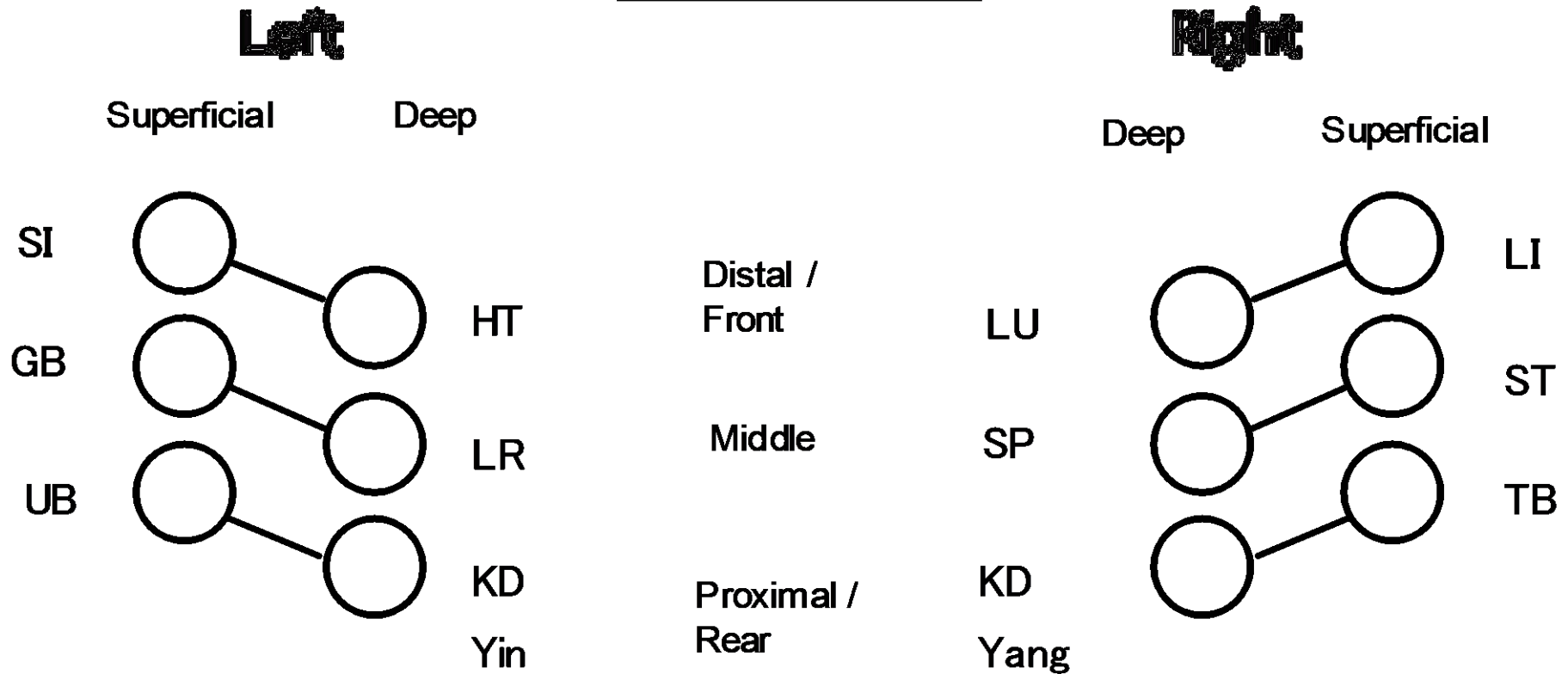
- The three sections of the pulse at the radial artery were called "inch" (CUN), "barrier" (GUAN) and "cubit" (CHI).
- In this book they will be called "Front", "Middle" and "Rear" respectively.
- Three levels at each of the three sections made the so-called "nine regions".

- The "Classic of Difficulties" clearly relates the three sections of the pulse to the three Burners.
- It says: "There are three positions, inch, bar and cubit and nine regions [each position being] superficial, middle and deep."

- The upper [distal] position corresponds to Heaven and reflects diseases from the chest to the head;
- the middle position corresponds to Person and reflects diseases between the diaphragm and umbilicus;
- the lower [proximal] position corresponds to Earth and reflects diseases from below the umbilicus to the feet".

- Over the centuries, there have been several different attributions of organs to individual pulse positions.
- The most commonly used today is derived from the "Pulse Classic" (Mai Jing) (A.D. 280) of Wang Shu He.

Pulse Positions



- Common assignment of pulse positions derived from "Pulse Classic"

- There exist in Chinese Medicine a number of contradictory pulse models (GM p355)
- The Pulse Classic model puts the paired organs/meridians together, so the SI and LI are in the Front position
- Others put the SI and LI in the Rear position, which reflects those organs' functional and anatomical position

- In the second of these two models, the Front positions reflect the state of the Upper Burner, the Middle positions the Middle Burner and the Rear positions the Lower Burner.
- The first model (from the Pulse Classic) is considered more suited to acupuncture as it reflects the arrangement of the Five Elements and meridians; where the second is more suited to herbal medicine, since it concerns organs and their functions.

Pulse Depth

- One should assess the pulse at three different depths: superficial, middle and deep.

- Superficial: felt by just resting the fingers on the artery very gently.
- Deep: felt by pressing quite hard to the point of nearly obliterating the pulse and then releasing very slightly.
- Middle: felt in between these two pressures.

- Thus, by examining the strength and quality of the pulse at the three levels, one can have an idea of the pathology of Qi, Blood or Yin, and also of the relative state of Yin and Yang.
- The clinical significance of the three levels was interpreted differently by different doctors but all these approaches are equally valid and should be borne in mind.

- For example, besides reflecting Qi, Blood and Yin, the three levels also reflect the following:
- Superficial level: Exterior diseases
- Middle level: Stomach and Spleen diseases
- Deep level: Interior diseases.

- Another interpretation of the three levels is as follows:
- the Superficial level reflects the state of Heart and Lungs (or Qi)
- the Middle level reflects the state of Stomach and Spleen (or Blood)
- the Deep level reflects the state of Liver and Kidneys (or Yin)

- Conversely one can interpret the three positions Front, Middle and Rear as reflecting the energies Qi, Blood and Yin respectively, as well as the three body areas of Upper, Middle and Lower and their respective organs

Method of Pulse Taking

Time

- Traditionally, the best time for taking the pulse is in the early morning when the Yin is calm and the Yang has not yet come forth.
- This is of course not always possible to achieve when patients are seen throughout the day.

Levelling the arm

- The patient's arm should be horizontal and should not be held higher than the level of the heart.

The fingers

- The practitioner's fingers are all placed on the pulse, which is felt with the first three fingers.
- To assess individual positions, it may be necessary to lift two of these fingers slightly, but, generally, it is better to keep all the fingers in place to get a better idea of Qi and Blood in general.

- The patient's left wrist is palpated by the practitioner's right hand and vice versa
- The index finger palpates the Front position, the middle finger the Middle, and the ring finger the Rear
- Fingers should be arranged relative to the size of the patient's wrists
- Pads of fingers are usually used as they tend to be more sensitive

- The fingers are moved in order to examine the pulse:
- *Lifting* and *Pressing* are used to feel the overall pulse (Floating or Deep, etc) and to gauge the different depths
- *Searching* means keeping the fingers still in order to gauge the pulse rate

- *Pushing* is a gentle lateral-to-medial movement used to feel the edges of the vessel and determine its shape and certain qualities of the pulse
- *Rolling* is a gentle proximal-to-distal movement which is used to gauge the length of the pulse or to read the pulse in very young children

Equalizing the breathing

- It is traditionally important for the practitioner to regulate and balance his or her own breathing pattern in order to be better attuned to the patient's Qi better and to become more receptive.
- Another reason for doing this was that the patient's pulse was correlated with the practitioner's breathing cycles in order to determine whether it is slow or rapid.

Factors to take into account

- Several factors should be taken into account in order to evaluate each pulse in its context and in relation to an individual patient.

Seasons

- These influence the pulse, it being deeper in wintertime and more superficial in summertime.

Sex

- Men's pulses are naturally slightly stronger than women's.
- Also, in men the left pulse should be very slightly stronger, and in women the right pulse should be slightly stronger.
- This is in accordance with the symbolism of Yin and Yang, following which the left side is Yang (hence male) and the right side is Yin (hence female).

- In men, the Front position should be very slightly stronger, while in women the Rear position should be so.
- This also follows the Yin- Yang symbolism according to which upper is Yang (hence male) and lower is Yin (hence female).

Occupation

- The pulse of those who are engaged in heavy physical work should be stronger than those who are engaged in mental work.

The normal pulse

- The pulse should have three qualities which are described as having Stomach-Qi, having spirit and having a root.

Stomach Qi

- A pulse is said to have Stomach Qi, when it feels "gentle", "calm" and is relatively slow (4 beats per respiratory cycle).

- A pulse with Stomach Qi is not rough.
- The Stomach is the Sea of Food, the Root of the Post- Heaven Qi and the origin of Qi and Blood. For this reason, it gives "body" to the pulse.
- If the pulse feels too rough or hard, it indicates that the Stomach function is impaired.

- "Simple Questions" chapter 19: "The Stomach is the Root of the 5 Yin organs; the Qi of the Yin organs cannot reach the Lung channel [i.e. the radial artery on the Lung channel] by itself but it needs Stomach-Qi ... if the pulse is soft it indicates that it has Stomach-Qi and the prognosis is good".
- This particular quality of being "soft" (but not too soft), "gentle", "calm" and "not rough" is important: beginners often take a rough and hard quality of the pulse as being "healthy".

Spirit

- The pulse is said to have spirit when it is soft but with strength, neither big or small and regular.
- It should also be regular in its quality, i.e. it should not change quality very easily and frequently.
- A pulse that has these qualities reflects a good state of Heart Qi and Blood.

Root

- A pulse is said to have root in two different senses.
- It has a root when the deep level can be felt clearly, and also when the Rear position can be felt clearly.
- Having a root indicates that the Kidneys are healthy and strong.
- Thus a pulse that has spirit, Stomach Qi and root indicates a good state of the Mind, Qi and Essence respectively.

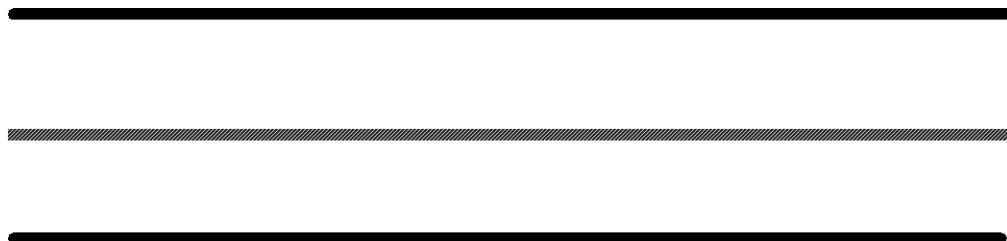
Basic Pulse Quality

- There are six basic qualities we look for in pulse-taking, arranged in Yin-Yang pairs:
- Deep -- Floating
- Slow -- Rapid
- Deficient (Empty) -- Excess (Full)

- A good pulse shows a balance between all of these qualities.
- The pulse can be felt most clearly in the medium depth, is of a moderate speed and has a calm, harmonious quality with a healthy resilience and no hardness.

- It is necessary to find the middle depth in order to determine which positions are deficient or excess.
- 1) First adjust all three fingers on each hand to find the depth where the pulse is felt most clearly beneath each finger.
- 2) Then, SINK the fingers toward the bone to find the YIN level, and FLOAT the fingers towards the surface to find the YANG level

Yang level



Yin level